

## How Melbourne got her groove back

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Published: November 1, 2014 - 12:37AM

There was a time when Melbourne's pulse beat at its strongest during business hours. Any after hours activity within Hoddle's grid was likely to be unsavoury, illicit or too bafflingly alternative for the masses to comprehend. Afterall, the city was a place of business - a functional but uninspiring hub routinely deserted on weekends.

Weekday workers dutifully trudged in from the suburbs on red rattlers and W-Class trams. Come closing time office workers returned en masse in a spirit forever captured in the sepia-toned oils of John Brack's "Collins Street, 5pm".

Socialising was done in the suburbs, not in the town. People gathered in local restaurants, corner pubs and around the kitchen table. If the weather was good and the summer evenings long, friends met beside the BBQ in the backyard.

Sure, thanks to post-war migration European-style cafes started appearing in the 1950s. But these outposts of sophistication were confined to pockets - pockets which would take decades to spill out from the wide main streets and polished arcades to the city's overlooked laneways.

Danish urban design guru Jan Gehl had a hand in transforming the city that grew to straddle the Yarra and embrace its bluestone backstreets.

For him "the Melbourne miracle" is one of the finest transformations in the world.

"If you don't know what to do (to transform a city) move to Melbourne," he says.

Modern Melbourne now corrals a million people a day through its 37-square-kilometre borders - double the number of two decades ago and equivalent to roughly one in six Victorians.

It's a place that in the 1980s boasted just two outdoor coffee shops, and now has 534 and counting. In the one-time dead heart, Saturday night foot traffic rivals the human tide on workdays.

Trade happens all hours of the day and night. In 1982 convenience stores didn't exist in the city centre. Five years later there were just four. By 2012 there were 60, supported by a residential population in excess of 116,000 - up from 2100 in 1993.

"If you compare what I have seen in the '70s and the '90s with what we can see now it is miraculous," Professor Gehl told Fairfax Media in an interview from Copenhagen, the first city to reap the rewards of his research.

Melbourne was the second - Professor Gehl's Places for People study was first done in 1994 and again in 2004.

The city council is completing the 2014 study, a fine-detail analysis of how we use the centre. It involves watching us closely: where we come from, how we travel, where we go, how we get there. The council knows 66 per cent of us walk the streets these days - and adjusts its plans accordingly. Where we sit, where we stand, how long we stay are carefully noted, as are things that make us linger and aesthetics that make us happy.

Lord mayor Robert Doyle highlights the ground beneath as an example. "Maybe we can do better than asphalt and so we have streets paved in beautiful bluestone - very expensive but I love it because it's actually a 100-year policy," Cr Doyle says.

His point - bluestone looks good, and it lasts - is a metaphor for the rejuvenated city itself.

Rob Adams, director of city design and the brains behind a revival process that began in 1983, says the key goal has been achieved. "[We] were seeking a 24-hour city that looked and felt like Melbourne. And I think that's been

delivered. Saturday night now rivals weekdays for the number of people in the city. That's a remarkable stat. It's a vindication of the fact that you can actually turn a city round and make it a 24-hour city."

Next is what Mr Adams calls the 20-minute city - "being able to access everything you want within 20 minutes, walking. I would argue ... we're very close to being the 20-minute city."

*This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/domain/melbourne/how-melbourne-got-her-groove-back-20141030-11ejsc.html>*